

# Department of Inspections and Appeals

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Lucas State Office Building • Des Moines, Iowa 50319-0083

## **For Immediate Release**

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**Contact:** David Werning  
**Phone:** (515) 281-7376

### **Polk County Restaurant Inspections Progress Smoothly**

DES MOINES, IOWA - The transfer of food safety inspections from Polk County to the Iowa Department of Inspections and Appeals (DIA) was “seamless” and all restaurants in the County are being inspected on a timely basis, DIA Director Steve Young said. DIA assumed the inspection of all food service establishments and lodging facilities in Polk County on July 1<sup>st</sup> following a decision earlier this year by the Polk County Board of Supervisors to terminate its contract with the Department.

Prior to terminating its contract with DIA, Polk County was responsible for licensing and inspecting approximately 2, 200 establishments for compliance with the Iowa Food Code and the Hotel Sanitation Code. When DIA assumed the contract, three of its nine environmental specialists were reassigned to cover restaurants and hotels in the greater Des Moines area.

“The transition of restaurant inspections from Polk County to DIA was seamless,” Director Young stated. “I doubt that any restaurant operator in Polk County really noticed any change in service.”

The Director complimented Polk County’s efforts to bring its inspections up-to-date prior to the transfer of responsibility. “Polk County has operated an exceptional food safety inspection program in this state, and its staff is to be commended on a job well done,” Director Young said.

Since assuming inspection duties in Polk County, state inspectors have conducted 449 routine food and lodging inspections. In addition, 731 temporary food stand inspections have been conducted during the first three months of the current fiscal year. Included in the number of temporary food stand inspections were those inspections conducted at this year’s Iowa State Fair.

One of the first successes after the transfer was the Department’s handling of inspections at the Iowa State Fair. “The Fair challenged the Department’s food inspections staff, as it represents the single-largest gathering of temporary food establishments in the state. Staff did an excellent job at the Fair, and vendors were highly complimentary of the level and quality of service provided,” Young added. State inspectors checked each and every one of the more than 200 food establishments operating at this year’s Iowa State Fair, and periodically performed rechecks throughout the 11-day event. To assess the performance of its inspectors, the Department

distributed Customer Satisfaction Surveys to all food stand operators. Tabulation of the results indicated that the vendors strongly believed that DIA's inspectors were polite, courteous, and professional.

"Overall, it appears that the Iowa State Fair vendors had a very positive experience with DIA's food inspectors," Director Young said. "I think the comments expressed by the vendors resoundingly support the fact that our inspectors are top-notch."

One of the vendors said of the state inspectors: *"We work with various health departments. I felt the way the inspectors related with our various stands was very professional. Ya'll rate up there with the best. Thanks!"*

The Director said the prediction he made earlier this summer that Iowans need not be concerned about the quality of food being prepared in restaurants in Polk County has been proven to be true. "With few exceptions, the food establishments in Polk County have been found to be in compliance with the provisions of the Iowa Food Code. The problems we have encountered," he continued, "were all relatively minor, and were easily and quickly corrected."

In addition to the routine and temporary inspections, state inspectors also performed 86 pre-opening inspections. Under Iowa law, all food establishments must undergo a pre-opening inspection before a license is issued. New establishments also must submit building plans for approval prior to construction.

"Prior to the opening of the Jordon Creek Town Center, each of the nearly two dozen restaurants submitted construction plans to the Department for review," the Director explained, adding: "A pre-opening inspection, too, was conducted on-site to verify that the building plans matched the actual restaurant layout, especially the kitchen and food preparation areas."

"It's a tribute to the restaurant owners and operators in Polk County, as well as the Department's dedicated staff, that the transition to DIA has been accomplished without a hitch. Our inspectors are spread thin, but they have continued their oversight in a professional manner," Young added.

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